



SESSION FOUR When God Cannot Work

Our cohesive, basic framework for the parenting process which I consider to be biblical *must* begin with God. *God* does it. But how He does it, He does it in a way that He has made known to us in Scripture. He *always* works through people. So I'm not surprised when I say this: that first God works in the *parents* and that has an effect on the child, and then God comes and works in the child.

Now, with a heavy heart I'd like to turn you to the other family in 1 Samuel—the sons of Eli. We will see this principle, this thesis, in reverse. It's the *saddest* thing you can find, especially for the child. My concern for family life, even marriage, began as I saw what happens to children. I felt it in my *own* life and then I talked to others and I see it in them, and my heart goes out to the children. And I *am* concerned with marriage, but two adults who do that, they *ask* for it. Children don't. One of the saddest pictures you'll ever see is this thesis in reverse. The two sons of Eli, as far as we can tell from the materials of Scripture, here's what we have.

Now God is no respecter of person. I don't want to get into any theology. Theologians, you know, battle about some of the *fine* points here. I'm *not* a theologian. But I *think* I see in Scripture that God is *no* respecter of person.

Here's this family, and I see this father; we've seen something of him before. Now if I didn't have Scripture for it, I wouldn't tell you. I'm not judging the man, because I know my heart too well. I *will not* judge him, I will not *condemn* him. I will simply show you what the Scripture shows as a constant warning to all of us—and it scares me. He's a religionist. He's like me. He's in it professionally. He's a priest. I don't know anything worse than a religionist professional preacher who lives like this.

Turn again—I say I will not touch this if God didn't tell me—chapter 2, verse 27. God comes to Eli and He calls another man of God and He says, "Go tell Eli my concern." Chapter 2, verse 27, "And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, 'Thus saith Jehovah, "Did I reveal Myself unto the house of thy father (Levi), when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh's house? Did I choose him (Levi) out of all of the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up unto Mine altar to burn incense, to wear the ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?"' "Did I not *call* you to be a go-between between Me and My people and make provision for their sins through the sacrifice?" Well, now you'll have to search the Scriptures and see if my interpretation is anywhere near right.

Verse 29, "Wherefore kick ye at My sacrifice and My offering, which I have commanded in My habitation; and honorest thy *sons* above Me, to make *yourselves* fat with the chiefest of *all* the offerings of Israel My people?" Therefore, because of this, I'm going to have to set you aside. I cannot tolerate it any longer.

Now let me give you my analysis of this. One of my great burdens is to see what happens sometimes to colleagues—I mean colleagues in the sense of in the profession and the ministry of full time preachers—what's happening to them today. It can happen to them, it can happen to me or you. And I'm convinced that this happened to Eli. God wanted to work in him, but Eli said "No."

Somebody asked me during the break, "Was he saved?" I don't know. I won't go into the theology of this, but what I see is there's a man. And when He says, "Why do you kick, why do you trample on My sacrifices?" Do you know what that means? "I don't care a snap of my finger," Eli said, "about God and about these sinners and about the sacrifice that could reconcile sinners to a holy God. I don't care anything about that. I want to make myself fat with the t-bone steaks out of that." All I *know* is *God* is not working in Eli! If he has been saved, then he's turned away. Now I'm not going to the issue of whether he's lost his salvation. That's a theological fine point which you'll have to settle on. But I know this: at this point, *God is not working in Eli*. And he's *left* to himself, and that *scares* me.

For us who are in full-time ministry, we who have children—and you know what they say about preacher’s kids! And it’s not easy to be—. And my boys went through it. Living on the campus of Columbia Bible College and always being known as “Mr. Hatch’s children.” Everybody, when we first moved there, I was teaching Child Psychology and we were living on the campus and I was telling them, you know, how to handle them. And then they’d watch my boys. And I would tell them in class you know, and then they’d go out there and—. How would *you* like to be the boy of the teacher of Child Psychology? Like a guinea pig! It’s not easy to be a preacher’s kid. But I’ll tell you, it’s not easy to be a preacher. It’s an *awful* responsibility. It’s not easy to be a parent. It’s an awful responsibility. But my thesis is: God must work in you.

But here’s a man, here’s a father. I don’t know enough about his . . . *why* he did it, where he stumbled—anything about it—except at this point God has been *shut out* of his life as far as that constant *interaction* with God and intervention of the Holy *Spirit* in his life to change him. Do you know what happens to *any* human being who rules God out of his life? There’s nothing left but to live unto yourself. The New Testament makes very clear, the operation of the flesh. And the only thing that can keep it under control is the ministry of God by the Holy Spirit. And if He’s not there, then the only thing left is that he lives unto himself, and then he puts his sons about God.

Now I cannot go, the Bible doesn’t give me enough information to tell you more about his life—his manner of life—but I can judge. I know what *I* would do. And *all* of that flesh that comes out—the *opposite* of what God wants to work in a parent. Do you know what that does to a child? The Bible tells us. Psychology, child psychology, sociology. . . I’ll tell you my friend; the books of the sciences are *filled*. I don’t think *anybody* can deny what they see—the effect of a self-centered life on a child. And you and I [are] living—and I don’t need to tell *you*—you and I are living in a culture that is *screaming* to you, and especially to you mothers, “You ought to seek your *own* fulfillment. Live for yourself—even if it means your children [suffer]. You have a right.” It tells us, “Seek your own fulfillment. Do it *your* way.” *That’s what we breathe all the time!* And what hurts me is the effect of this on a child.

I’m going to step out in speculation and I told you in one of the other sessions that I don’t know *anything* about the mother. I hesitate even to speculate, but I’ll tell you theoretically the possibilities. I wouldn’t be surprised, because it *normally* works this way. It’s very rare that you’ll find an opposite over here. It’s *probably*—and I say probably—I’m purely speculating, now; the Bible doesn’t say, but *probably* his mother was like this. But it’s very, very difficult and it could be that some of you wives who are living in that situation where your husband is going the other way, and to *stand*, and to *stand*, and to *stand for God* is awful difficult. I wouldn’t be surprised if she was the same, and so these children got this from here and probably got this [from here]—that’s speculation.

But let’s suppose she is a godly woman like Hannah. Put yourself in the boy’s place. Do you know what that means? Do you know what that does to a child, especially boys? Mama says, “Let’s go this way.” Daddy says, “Let’s go this way.” Which way do you think the boys are going? If they don’t, it will rip them. Do you know what effect this has on a child? The Scripture speaks to *this*. Now my thesis is it’s the same thing, but the thesis now in reverse. If God does not work . . . in the parent, it leaves the parent to *act* in a way that is *self-centered*. Do you know the effect of that? It also—and this is my heavy concern because I talk to students all the time who have been through it, and I want to tell you *I’ve* been through it. I know that this kind of behavior *also* has a natural effect on a child and it’s devastating. And *God* speaks to it! The sciences are *filled* with it! They can predict—a child psychologist, given a certain behavior here—what it will do to the child. It’s just a natural law. It’s devastating.

I want to turn you to the time, to the Scripture where God speaks about this. It’s a passage—and I’m sure all of you, if you’re not familiar with it, you’ve heard it at least. Turn with me to Exodus. And I am convinced, now you’ll have to search the Scriptures and see if what I am giving is true to Scripture. That’s *your* responsibility as a believer. But I am convinced that this is what the Bible means—what God means in Exodus 20 when He says this *fearsome* word. Exodus chapter 20, verse 5 and 6 in connection with this commandment where you don’t make a graven image unto God. Pick it up in verse 5: “Thou shall not bow down thyself unto them nor serve them.” Don’t make any idol, don’t make any visible thing that represents God because nothing can represent your wonderful God. Don’t worship such representation. Now watch. Here is my concern: “For I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God . . .” Now look: “. . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me.” I don’t think anything could be clearer. Now you *must* understand that.

Now I want to share with you my interpretation of this passage. I invite your careful consideration. Now listen, here’s what the Bible says. He’s talking about those who hate God. Now if you interpret that to anybody who has turned his back on God, then you’ve got Eli, who’s turned his back on God and said “no” to God. He’s still a professional priest, but in that sense he hates God and he’s turned his back on God.

Now watch. Here's what he's talking about. "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." What does that mean? May I suggest to you that the translation of this—and I very rarely refer to various versions or translations of the Bible because there are so many and, you know, all of them have something good to offer—but the New International Version translates this in a way that is unacceptable. I'm not knocking it; I use the translation. I'm not knocking it; I'm just saying. You see, any translation is an interpretation. Now here is the way they translate it: God says, "God will punish the children for the sins of the father for the third and fourth generation." That God will punish this child for his sin. I think that's intolerable.

Does that seem fair to you? That God would punish *my* child for *my* sin? Let me ask you, you children, you young people, did you like it when your parents punished you for something your brother did? Do you think that's right for parents, *knowing* that? Well you say, "Well that—." I'm going to show you, before this session is over, that the Scripture teaches that that is intolerable.

But I want to tell you what I think it means. It does not *say* that God will punish them for their sin. He says He will *visit* their sin upon the child. And if you take *all* of the screaming evidence of the child psychologists and the child psychiatrists, here's what you'll find. You'll find that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children in what way? That this thing has a *devastating* effect *naturally* on that child. So much so that one writer that I want to develop with you in a later session says, "If this is an extreme degree, they are hardly human."

Now I don't want to scare you, I just want to show you the *devastating* effect of a parent who is living unto himself and he's *sinful*. And he's sinful. He's turning, he's rebelling against God. *That* has an awful, *awful* effect on these children. I keep telling you that I talk to students all of the time like this. My wife says, "Buck, you sound like a broken record." There ought to be *some* exceptions. But I want to tell you, I have never talked to any young person who's having struggles—who's having what we call "hang-ups," what hinders him from going on with God and trusting God—I've never found one that I haven't said, "Tell me about your father. Tell me about your mother. How'd they get along?"

I talked to one student some years ago. [He said,] "I saw my mother and father fought all the time. I saw my father commit suicide in my living room." That doesn't bother a child? The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. *It has a natural, devastating effect!*

The only way you know it really is if you've been through it. I've been through it. I know what it did to me to see my mother and father living unto themselves, fussing all the time. I know what it did when my father turned away from my mother and ran off with another woman. I know what it did to my sister when she had to state that she was the last one to see my father physically abuse my mother. I know what it does. I'm convinced that's what God means when He says, "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." It has a natural effect on them.

All right, that's my thesis. I don't know anything about this, but the best you can say, "She's a woman of God" and there you're going to have an awful tension. Do you know what that does to a child? That is visited upon the child. How would you like to have to decide between your mother and your father? It's intolerable. My thesis is when God is not working in these parents, then it has a natural, devastating effect which God describes as "visiting their sins upon the children of the third and fourth generation." And the child psychiatrists are picking up on that; some of them call it a vertical epidemic.

And I've had young fellows—and some occasions young girls—tell me, especially fellows, "I saw the way my father, the way he treated my mother and I *determined* I would *never* be that way! And now I see myself that way." It just goes from generation to generation. That natural effect will just keep on going.

And I praise God that with me He has broken it. Some of it with my children, but my grandchildren are free. Hallelujah. That's my thesis. That's half of it. Say it with me again. If God doesn't work in the parents, you are left to sinful behavior. It'll vary. I'm not saying this unsaved, rebelling parent will always run off with another woman, but he'll be living for himself. It might be he'll just work all the time; he's wrapped up in his work or something. He'll always be living unto himself and that *devastates* a child!

Now let's turn to the other side. Oh, I'm so glad I can do this. Now look! A second way in which God works, now get the thesis because in our last session we will have a final exam and I will ask you, "What is the thesis, the two parts of the thesis?" The first is—say it with me—God works what? *In* the parent. If He doesn't work in the parent, I'm left to my own sinful way, and that has a devastating effect. That's the first [part]. "Well that's not fair! These boys didn't have a chance!" Oh, no. *Watch*.

The second way in which God works, God comes and works *directly* in these boys. Well, now wait a minute! Turn with me back to 1 Samuel and let's see what *their* response was. 1 Samuel chapter 2, verse 24. Watch *their* response. Do you think they said to God, "Oh, anything You want, I'm Your servant. Anything You want to, I will do. Speak!?" Oh, no. Listen to *these* boys. In verse 24 Eli is talking to them. He knows they've been laying with the women who did service at the door of the Tent of Meeting. And he says to them, "Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: you make Jehovah's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, God will judge him: but if a man sin against Jehovah, who shall entreat for him?" Now listen to their response, notwithstanding: "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father." I want to tell you; see, at that point, when a child says "no" to his father, he is saying no to God. There's no question to *me* that these boys told God "no." God came in a valley. Now I can't prove it just from this passage, but from other Scriptures, from what I know about God and His ways, that God will come to these. You say they don't have a chance? "Do I have a *chance*?" God will come to these and He says, "Boys, will you let Me come in? Will you open your heart to Me? I'll make something beautiful out of that wreck. Will you?" What'd they say? "No. Absolutely not." And they *hearkened* not, and they *would* not, and they are left to themselves. And are you surprised, then, that in the day in which they lived—and it's almost like our day—are you surprised then that they didn't care a snap of their finger about God or about His sacrifices? All they wanted was T-bone steak and the women who were attractive. And so they were living for themselves. Let me ask you this, did they have a chance? Yes or no? *Could* they have? Oh yes.

Now let me turn you to another passage of Scripture which you *always* ought to read when you read Exodus 20 about the sins of the fathers. Don't *ever* read that passage or teach it without turning to Ezekiel chapter 18. Ezekiel chapter 18 is the other side. Could they have said—? Look, could they have—? Suppose those *boys*, coming out of a situation like this—and that's probably true of some of you—coming out of a situation like this . . . and I've talked to students who had parents like this, and when God came to them they said "yes" to God? Then what does God do? *God invades those lives*. Did they have a chance? Sure they had a chance.

Listen to Ezekiel chapter 18. Let me read a few verses, and I'll give you my interpretation. You'll have to search it and be sure it's correct. Ezekiel chapter 18, verse 1. "The word of Jehovah came unto me again saying, 'What mean ye, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes,"' Now that's a figure of speech. Have you ever eaten a green persimmon? It makes your mouth pucker. Well now, here's the figure. The fathers have eaten the green persimmons, and the children's lips pucker. Do you see what He's saying? The fathers have sinned and the children get the punishment. God says, "No, that's never the way it is." That's not it. Read on. "As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion to use anymore this proverb. Behold, all people are Mine. *All* souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the *son* is mine." Listen, "The soul that sinneth, *he* shall be disciplined and punished, not for the father's sin." You had better understand that.

Drop down to verse 14. And this makes it very clear. "Now, lo, if he a wicked father"—which he has just described in the preceding paragraph—"if he beget a son that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and feareth, and doeth not such like, that. . ." And He then describes him; drop down to verse 17: ". . . that hath withdrawn his hand from the poor, that hath not received interest nor increase, hath executed Mine ordinances, hath walked in My statutes. . ." listen, ". . . he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live."

I want to tell you with *great* joy—look up here as we close—with *great* joy, and I know because I've been through it; a child here, even though he's had none of this, can say "yes" to God and God can come and make something beautiful out of that life. He's done it with me.

But wait a minute? Well you say, "Well, it doesn't matter." It doesn't matter what happens here? Oh yes. You know what you'll have? You'll have a person, and I've been through it. It'll leave scars. It'll leave things that will hound you for the rest of your life. And I wrestle with them and I *hate* them, but they *drag* and they *kick* me. And they're scars and I *know* where they come from.

But when I came and met God, I turned it over to God and I'll just say it to His glory; God picked me up out of the mire and began to make something good out of me. *But oh, the problems and the scars!*

My wife has had to put up with them as I began to work through [them]. For 41 years she stood with me and all of my scars. But I'll tell you, to praise God, He even takes those scars and overrules them with blessing.

Does he have a chance, yes or no? You had better believe it. That's my thesis. Now look, I say it is a cohesive system of truths into which you may fit all of your living with children, and I *personally* believe as we develop it in detail, it will answer all of your questions. It sounds good to me; I hope it does to you. That's God's blueprint for parenting. Next session we will go into the detailed specifications.